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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5535
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3255
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3120
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3778
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001024

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/12/2019

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: ONE GROUP'S GRASSROOTS EFFORT TO
DEVELOP CIVIL SOCIETY

REF: ASHGABAT 941

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On August 11, Political Officer attended a training-for-trainers seminar organized by Natalya Shabunts and her NGO, "Civic Dignity." The two-day seminar, which was conducted in the living room of Shabunts' apartment located in a Soviet-era highrise, was led by Shabunts and involved eight participants. The subject matter was public awareness of the challenges and rights of people with disabilities. The participants were a mix of experienced trainers who had led meetings on this subject, and others who were learning about how to plan and conduct such meetings.

¶2. (C) One participant shared her experience conducting a seminar on people with disabilities with a football club of 14-15 year olds. She described the stages of her presentation, including an explanation about the types and causes of disabilities, practical exercises where the teenagers simulated a disability, for example blindness by covering their eyes and attempting to draw, and a film that showed accomplishments of disabled persons. The participant thought the training had had an impact, mentioning that during feedback at the end, the participants agreed that referring to disabled persons as "invalids," which is a commonly used term here, is inappropriate and should be avoided. With other groups, this participant had shown the Hoffman-Cruise film, "Rain Man," combined with breaks and discussion, to sensitize people about autism.

¶3. (C) There was lively exchange among the participants at the seminar, especially as they shared experiences from trainings they had lead and related stories about some of the attendees. They agreed on the need for seminars to deal with additional subjects such as suicide, particularly among young people, and ethnic prejudice among children and young people, which they said is learned at home from parents. They stressed the need for instructional materials and literature that could be distributed to the public, and particularly the need for Turkmen language material. Participants said many young people do not speak Russian, rendering most currently available films and printed materials on these subjects inaccessible to their target audiences.

14. (C) COMMENT: Informal and small scale, this training session was typical of the continuing efforts of unregistered civil society to address social issues through education and awareness. The topics that arose, persons with disabilities, suicide, ethnic prejudice, are clearly on people's minds, and are illustrative of the areas in which civil society could work to supplement government resources in addressing social issues. Unfortunately, the government's refusal to allow such groups to work openly not only makes their challenging social agenda harder to achieve, but for the activists, personally risky. END COMMENT.
MILES